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Front Edit Other
Page Page Page

Date:

Wants Birch Society Forced Into Open

In your editorial on the John Birch Society you quite rightly point out that our concept of political freedom should be based on recognition of the entire spectrum of viewpoints, from extreme right to extreme left.

In the interests of realism, however, I question whether a Marxist society of the same dimensions as the Birch group would not be dealt with much more readily in this country. We tend to forget that the two extremes contain the same inherent threat to our cherished liberties.

You imply that though Mr. Welch's is a secret society with a secret nationwide membership of over 100,000 paying enormous dues (\$1,000 for a

life membership), it is not likely to be a danger because Fascism in the world has been fragmented. This is open to question, certainly. There was no world-wide Fascism when Hitler came to power.

You state also that the danger has now been minimized by "conscientious disclosure by the press." In reality, the press has been very reticent, as cautious in its criticism as it was with McCarthy. We have been told in the mildest terms that the organization held President Eisenhower—along with the CIA, the FBI, the UN, etc.—to be Communist, but that Mr. Welch subsequently backed down with the remarkable statement that since he had made the charge only in private it could not be held against him.

Perhaps this is the crux of the danger, and also the reason for the society's conduct.

The solution lies not in forbidding membership in a group like this, but in forcing it into the open. It must be genuinely exposed and answered. The literature, some of which I have seen, should be printed in the newspapers.

Mr. Welch has been called "sincere." It would be wise to remember that all but a very few courageous members of the press and of Congress thought Sen. Joseph McCarthy "an honest man of sincere conviction" too, and that the Southern racists are usually sincere, not to mention the Communists themselves.

R. L. O'Neill

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